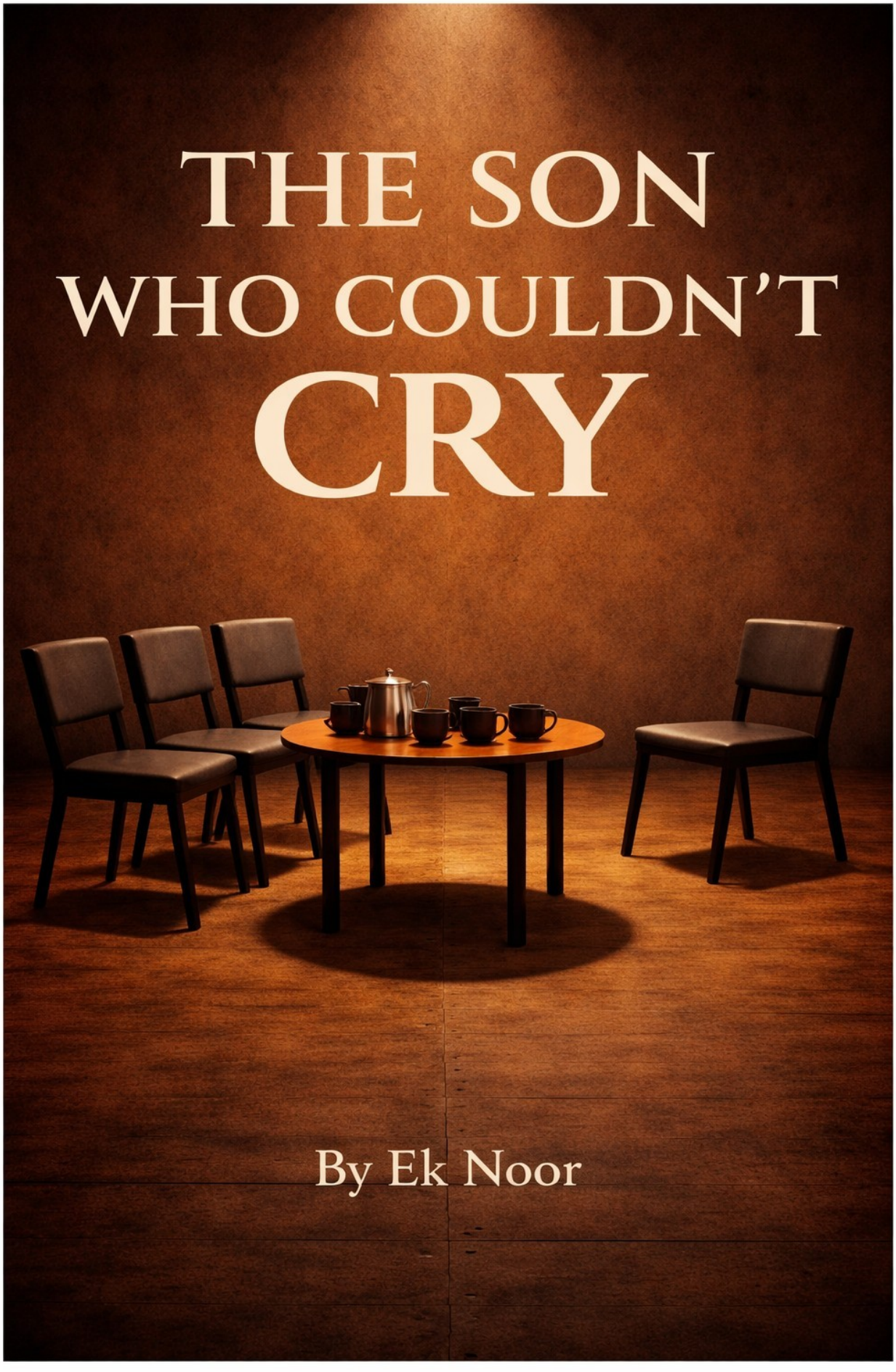
THE SON WHO COULDN'T CRY



By Ek Noor

The Son Who Couldn't Cry

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Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to real people, families, or places is purely coincidental.

Character List:

ARJUN (40s) - A secondary school English teacher of South Asian heritage. Recently lost his father.

RAJ (40s) - An accountant of South Asian heritage. Recently divorced.

IMRAN (50s) - A taxi driver of South Asian heritage. Devout. Recently widowed.

PETER (60s) - A man of non-South Asian heritage. Retired and a volunteer counsellor.

Desi is a colloquial term used to describe South Asian heritage people.

ACT I

Scene 1: “Tea First, Then Talk”

A plain room. Chairs arranged in a loose circle, angled slightly toward the audience. **PETER** *is seated in the chair furthest away from the table, notebook closed.* **IMRAN** *enters with a tray of mugs.* **RAJ** *follows, carrying a tin of biscuits.* **ARJUN** *is already seated. They set the tray and tin on the table. Each man takes a mug, sits.*

PETER: Right. Tea first, then talk. That’s the rule.

ARJUN: Whose rule?

PETER: Mine. Easier to speak when your hands are warm.

(Pause. They sip.)

IMRAN: Patience is half of faith. My father said a man never argues with God. You bow and carry on.

RAJ: And the other half?

IMRAN: Acceptance.

ARJUN: That’s easy if you believe in something.

IMRAN: You don’t?

ARJUN: I teach poetry. Belief’s optional. Metaphor’s compulsory.

PETER: Before we drift too far...names first. I’m **PETER**. Volunteer counsellor. My job’s to listen, not feel. Old habit.

IMRAN: **IMRAN**. Taxi driver. Doctor said I should “share.” I told him I already share a cab. He didn’t laugh.

(A faint smile moves round the circle.)

ARJUN: **ARJUN**. English teacher. Trouble sleeping. Too much thinking.

RAJ: **RAJ**. Accountant. Divorced. Mum says freedom looks good on me...
Not sure she means it kindly.

(Short silence.)

PETER: Good. You've all said more in a minute than most do in an hour.
That's a start.

ARJUN: Do we ever actually talk about pain here...or just drink tea? My dad used to say, "A man keeps going." I believed him.

PETER: When you're ready.

(Pause. One of them replaces his mug on the table. The sound lands in the quiet.)

Blackout.

Scene 2: "Stories About Other People"

The same room. The tray of mugs and the biscuit tin remain. They've settled into the circle.

A pause.

PETER: How's the week been?

IMRAN: Quiet. Work, mosque, sleep. Nothing to complain about.

ARJUN: Complaining is half the point, isn't it?

PETER: Sometimes it helps to start with a story. Maybe about someone you know.
A friend. A neighbour.

(They hesitate.)

ARJUN: I've got one.
A teacher I know.
Lost his father.
Kept working straight through.
Marked essays the night of the funeral.
Didn't shed a tear.
Everyone said he was strong.
He believed them.
Now he can't sleep.

(Pause.)

IMRAN: There's a man near me.
His wife died.
He prays five times a day.
Still wakes in the night, calling her name.
He says faith keeps him calm.
His eyes say otherwise.

RAJ: I knew a couple.
She ran a business.
He… kept things balanced.
She left.
Said he didn’t feel enough.
He thought feelings were meant to be steady, not loud.
Turns out steady can look like empty.
Mum says a good son never leaves home. Guess
I believed that too long.

(A longer pause. Peter watches them.)

PETER: These are good stories.
What do they want?
The teacher, the praying man, the steady husband.

ARJUN: Sleep.
Peace.
Understanding.

IMRAN: Forgiveness.

RAJ: Start again.

PETER: And what stops them?

ARJUN: Pride.

IMRAN: Fear.

RAJ: Habit.

(Quiet. They sip from their mugs.)

PETER: Sounds familiar.

ARJUN: To who?

PETER: All of you.

(Pause.)

IMRAN: Patience is still half of faith.

ARJUN: And the other half?

IMRAN: Saying what you mean.

(They sit with that. One reaches for the biscuit tin, opens it softly. The lid clicks shut.)

Blackout.

ACT II

Scene 1: “The Exercise”

Same room. The mugs and biscuit tin remain, half-empty. The circle holds.

PETER: I thought we might try something different.
A short exercise.
Write a letter...to someone you can’t speak to.
You don’t have to read it.
Just write.

(He hands round small sheets of paper, a few pens. Silence as they settle.)

ARJUN: What if the person’s dead?

PETER: Still counts.
They can listen.

IMRAN: And if God is the person?

PETER: Then you’re halfway to prayer.

(A pause. They begin. Only the sound of pens. After a moment, ***RAJ*** *puts his pen down, blank page untouched.)*

PETER: Stuck?

RAJ: She’d say this kind of thing is Western nonsense.
You don’t write feelings; you do your duty.
I don’t write letters.
Numbers, yes.
Letters, no.

ARJUN: Try one word.
See where it goes.

*(***RAJ** *shakes his head.)*

ARJUN: *(reading)*
“Dear Dad...
You never cried, so neither did I.
Now you’re gone, and I still can’t.
Yours, **ARJUN**.”

(Pause)
It’s a draft.

*(***IMRAN** *shifts, uneasy.)*

IMRAN: Mine’s…
“Dear Allah *(pause)*
I’m angry.
Please don’t take it personally.”
(He folds the page quickly.)
Enough.

*(***RAJ** *watches them, jaw tight.)*

PETER: You don’t have to read, Raj.
Just write.

RAJ: What’s the point?
Letters don’t change what’s done.
They just sit there...paper waiting for answers.

ARJUN: Maybe it’s not about answers.
Maybe it’s proof you tried.

*(***RAJ** *stands a little.)*

RAJ: My wife left because she wanted feelings, not proof.
Letters wouldn’t have saved it.

(Pause. No one moves.)

PETER: That’s something you could tell her.
Even on paper.

*(***RAJ** *sits again, staring at the blank page.)*

IMRAN: Sometimes blank is safer.

ARJUN: Sometimes it’s cowardice.

*(***IMRAN** *looks at him sharply.)*

PETER: Gentle, please.

(**ARJUN** lowers his eyes. Silence.)

RAJ: I used to think silence was respect.
Maybe it’s just laziness.

(No one answers. **PETER** *closes his notebook.)*

PETER: That’s enough for tonight.
Keep the pages.
Don’t throw them away.

(They gather their things slowly. **RAJ** *folds his blank sheet, pockets it.*
IMRAN *carries the tray toward the kitchenette.)*

Blackout.

Scene 2: “The Breaking Prayer”

Same room. The mugs and biscuit tin remain. The circle is smaller tonight...they sit closer. A pause before anyone speaks.

PETER: You all came back.
That’s something.

IMRAN: Not sure why.
Didn’t sleep.
Didn’t pray.

PETER: That’s all right.

IMRAN: It isn’t.
Prayer’s the only thing I’ve done right.
If I lose that...what’s left?

*(***ARJUN** *watches him.)*

IMRAN: I woke before dawn.
Opened the Qur’an.
Read the same verse three times.
Nothing.
No sound, no comfort.
So I cursed Him.
Out loud.
First time in my life.

*(***RAJ** *shifts, uneasy.)*

RAJ: Maybe He understands.

IMRAN: Don’t say that.
You don’t speak for Him.
I...
(He breaks off.)
I felt my throat close.
As if He was listening and waiting for me to apologise.

PETER: *(quietly)* Maybe He was just listening.

*(***IMRAN** *stands, trembling slightly.)*

IMRAN: All these years I told my wife “have faith.”
When she was dying.
When she said she was scared.
I said “have faith.”
And now I can’t say it to myself.

(He sinks to his knees, half praying, half sobbing.)

IMRAN: If You’re there, forgive me.
If You’re not, forgive me anyway.

*(***ARJUN** *rises, moves to him, places a hand lightly on his shoulder.* **RAJ** *stays seated, hands knotted.* **PETER** *stands but doesn’t speak.)*

IMRAN: I’m tired of being patient.

ARJUN: Then don’t be.

(Pause. **IMRAN** *stays on the floor, breathing steadier.)*

PETER: Sometimes patience isn’t silence.
It’s this...staying long enough to tell the truth.

*(***IMRAN** *nods, eyes closed.)*

IMRAN: Maybe.
Maybe that’s prayer too.

(They sit with him. No one moves to tidy or comfort further. Stillness.)

Blackout.

ACT III

Scene 1: “The Empty Chair”

The same room. The mugs and biscuits remain where they were left. The air feels lighter and used. **PETER** *enters first. He sets an extra chair in the circle. No one asks why.*

PETER: Whoever you need to talk to tonight...
imagine they’re sitting there.
That’s all.

*(***IMRAN**, **ARJUN**, **RAJ** *take their seats. A pause.)*

IMRAN: *(quietly)*
Naseema...
you said you were scared.

I told you to be strong.
You were dying,
and I gave you sermons.
I'm sorry.
(beat)
If faith is real,
maybe you already forgave me.

*(***ARJUN** *nods toward the empty chair.)*

ARJUN: He kept driving. Always forward, never looking back. I learned that too well**.**
Dad...
you taught me stillness,
but not what to do with it.
When you went,
I buckled your ashes into the passenger seat.
The alarm kept beeping.
I laughed.
I hate that laugh.
(softer)
I wish we'd both cried.
*(***RAJ** *shifts, restless.)*

RAJ: Sonia...
I kept the house tidy.
The bills paid.
I thought that was love.
When you packed,
I made tea for Mum.
I thought I was comforting her.
Turns out I just picked the easier woman to love.
(beat)
You were right to go.
I'm trying to see what you saw.

(Pause. **PETER** *stares at the chair for a long time.* **PETER** *touches his closed notebook.)*

PETER: I was taught to keep feeling out of the room.
(beat)
That didn't save anyone.

PETER: Lucy...
you wrote, *"You helped everyone but us."*
You were right.
I read that message every week.
I couldn't reply.

This is the reply.
I’m sorry I made silence look like care.

(They sit quietly.)

IMRAN: Feels strange.
Talking to air.

ARJUN: Maybe it’s not air any more.

*(***RAJ** *picks up the empty mug from beside the chair, sets it down again.)*

PETER: That’s enough for tonight.

(No one moves. The silence holds, gentle now, shared.)

Blackout.

Scene 2: “The Son Who Couldn’t Cry”

Same room. Same circle of chairs. The extra chair is gone. They enter in silence, one by one. **RAJ** *carries the biscuit tin.* **IMRAN** *follows with the mugs.* **PETER** *sits.* **ARJUN** *enters. Each man takes a mug. They sit.*

(A pause.)

PETER: No exercise tonight.
Just tea.

(They sip. The sound is small, ordinary.)

IMRAN: Feels quiet.

PETER: That’s all right.

*(***RAJ** *opens the biscuit tin, offers it round. Each takes one. He leaves it open on the table.)*

ARJUN: My mother used to say...
you can’t heal what you hide.
(beat)
I thought she was talking about her students.
Maybe she meant me.

*(***IMRAN** *nods.* **RAJ** *looks at his mug.)*

RAJ: I told Mum, I might move out.
She cried.
Then made tea.
I stayed.

But I said it.
That’s something.

*(***PETER** *smiles faintly.)*

PETER: That’s something.

(A quiet stretch of silence. No tension, just stillness. Then, without warning, **ARJUN’***s voice breaks.)*

ARJUN: I keep dreaming the urn is still in the car.
Every time I stop, the seatbelt alarm starts.
It won’t shut up.
(He laughs once, then stops.)
All my life they told me a man drives on, doesn’t stop.
Maybe stopping is what makes us human.

*(***IMRAN** *reaches out, rests a hand on his arm.)*

IMRAN: They told us, men must never question God.
Maybe faith begins with the question.

RAJ: *(softly)* They told me a good son never leaves.
Maybe he does...so his mother can rest too.

PETER: *(quietly)*
They told me to listen, not feel.
Maybe feeling *is* the work.

(They sit together. No triumph, no music...just the shared breath of men who’ve dropped their armour.)

PETER: That’s enough for today.

(They remain seated, mugs in hand. Light fades until only the circle is visible.)

End.